

STRAVAIG #11

Geopoetics & the Climate Crisis



Poems

Art

Essays



Geopoetics

- ∞ places the Earth at the centre of our experience
- ∞ develops heightened awareness of it using all our senses and knowledge
- ∞ seeks to overcome the separation of mind and body and of human beings from the rest of the natural world.
- ∞ learns from others who have attempted to find a new approach to thinking and living, e.g. 'outgoers' like Henry Thoreau, Nan Shepherd, Patrick Geddes, Joan Eardley, Kenneth White and many others.
- ∞ expresses the Earth through oral expression, writing, the visual arts, music, geology, geography, other sciences, philosophy, combinations of art forms and of the arts, sciences and thinking.
- ∞ develops a network of Geopoetics Centres with a common concern about the planet and a shared project to understand geopoetics and apply it in different fields of research and creative work.
- ∞ opens up the possibility of radical cultural renewal for individuals and for society as a whole.

More information:

www.geopoetics.org.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/ScottishGeopoetics/>

<https://twitter.com/SCGeopoetics>

Front cover image: Caroline Watson, *Along the Horizon With or Without Us* (detail)

Back cover image: Dina Fachin, *Winter*, watercolor, ink, ink marker, quill pen, salt, and graphite on paper

Design and layout by Caroline Watson

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Editorial

Despite (or possibly because of) the Covid-19 pandemic, the accelerating climate crisis, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the lying, corrupt UK Johnson Government, there has been a remarkable growth of interest in Geopoetics in Scotland and worldwide.

We have now held seven Virtual Geopoetics Conversations and a splendid Virtual Tony McManus Lecture which were very well attended and are available to watch here: <https://bit.ly/GeopoeticsConversations>. They cover topics as varied as Geopoetics in Scotland and Appalachia, Music and Visual Arts and Geopoetics, Rewilding and Tackling the Climate Crisis, Towards a Green Consciousness, Eastern thinking in the life and work of Alan Spence and Poetry and Geopoetics. These online events and our documentary film Crowdfunder have attracted many new members to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics and we have doubled our membership to an all time high. Clearly geopoetics as the creative expression of the Earth is exerting a broad appeal to those who are concerned about the way the world is going.

More Conversations to come include Geology and Geopoetics, Education and Geopoetics and Trans-disciplinary Approaches to Geopoetics. This year we have raised over £14,000 in donations to make the first full length documentary film about geopoetics. In March, members in England and Wales visited Helpston and the cottage of poet John Clare and were inspired to write poems and prose which we will publish in issue 12 of *Stravaig* in the autumn.

This issue contains perceptive reflections on COP26 from Elizabeth Rimmer and Ullrich Kockel and some sparkling poems that relate to the climate and ecological crises and their effects. Philip Tonner's scholarly essay provides a deep-going analysis of intellectual nomadism in the work

of Kenneth White and Martin Heidegger. Mandy Haggith follows her previous insightful essays on Fire in issue 8.2 and Ice in issue 10 with one on Stone in this issue. A Sudden Strangeness by Susan Holliday with its lovely images is a thoughtful meditation on how our perception of the world affects our psyche and creativity and advocates that we make something of our experiences of nature. Dina Fachin has again graced our pages with some of her beautiful artwork.

We are particularly grateful to Caroline Watson for contributing our front page cover, photographs of COP26 protests and for once again designing this issue of *Stravaig*.

All in all, some excellent reading for the summer of 2022!

Editors: Norman Bissell, Ullrich Kockel, Callum Sutherland, Caroline Watson and James Murray-White.

Blind-sided

A C Clarke

It slips in quietly and everybody
congratulates spring for coming sooner

and flowers and birds for clocking on
earlier than ever – daffodils in November!

Emails end with felicitations –
hope you're making the most of the sunshine.

And yes, the heart can't help but quicken
in gentle air after a rough week,

all the small cheepers blurting from a tree
on the brink of leaf as if winter were not

a weather system away. As if the world
would tilt always towards the right balance.

Who can tell insects not to wake,
buds to sit tight before the jet stream

changes its mind? Scientists shake their heads.
They read the signs, foretell what's coming.

'If this is global warming, bring it on!'
cry those who can't see, dazzled by the sun.

Lived in

A C Clarke

We climb the steep glen. The spring landscape
remembers autumn, the tawny slopes could mean
dieback or growth. I've often noted
how spring shoots at birth are red
as newborns after the first breath.

From the top we look down to the valley floor
ribboned by burns, ruled straight by fences;
turn our backs for the high moor where
lark and peewit and curlew shout
and the hills blur into cloudpeak and snowshelf.

Yet even here the tractor's tyreprint rolls
over ditch and stone and tender grass
and lambs cry for the teat. There's not an inch
of this country untrodden. Even the moles
breed thick near postholes, furrows,

tunnel into the turned land. Free as air
we say taking deep into our lungs
the exhalations of our metal horses,
each rain-filled loch smudged by the thumbprint
of decades-old atomic fires.

Live From COP26

Elizabeth Rimmer

This photo was taken by Patrick Corbett, one of four poets from the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics (the others were Leela Soma and the Director of the Centre, Norman Bissell, and two musicians, Rory McLeod and Ada Francis) who read at an event called Greening the Blue Chips run by RSK. This stands for Responsible, Sustainable, Knowledgeable, and they are an employee-owned company who help engineering projects become more (genuinely) eco-friendly. While I remain unhappy about the concept of sustainable growth, I pretty soon realised that this is a serious and idealistic group, genuinely challenging the green-washing and short-term narrow focus of much of industry. If you thought this was a done deal, in the light of what came out of the event, there was a survey discussed by a representative from Nature Positive of the attitudes of the companies in the FTSE100, which revealed that only 65% of companies are thinking about net zero and biodiversity issues at all, and only three are actively planning for their Scope 3 emissions for a short definition of what those are). But these people are all about a serious wake up call to their colleagues, which was very refreshing.

Many of the 150+ business leaders and representatives at this conference were already trying harder than that, and were



seriously interested in trying to do more. Here are some of the things I learned:

- Every single reservoir in Scotland is at unusually low levels (England's are even worse). I thought the speaker didn't remember 1975 and 76, but those were acute seasons of crisis, whereas what we are looking at is something more chronic. It's not so much that we've had good summers, but that we've had a run of dry winters and springs. We can no longer be frivolous about our dreich weather, and complacent that we will never have to worry about water. And even those of us who have known our landscape and climate for years have to admit that we don't know as much as we thought. Things are really changing.
- Only 1% of the batteries for electric cars are currently recycled, and they are deemed to be too depleted for proper functioning when their capacity is below 80%. Clearly there needs to be some serious work done here.
- There is no longer a debate in industry about climate change. Everyone has acknowledged there is a problem, though you can't always guarantee they are handling it the same way. One of the most dynamic speakers of the day had worked in fashion, and becoming aware of how disastrous fast fashion is, had worked to cut the waste,

energy consumption, pollution and water usage in her factory. The response of her head office was to get rid of her, and so she founded To Be Frank. She was very vocal about transparency, all along the supply chain, and pointed out that an industry that can afford to pay for the waste they produce, can afford not to. This went down pretty well, in that room!

- There is as much passion within some parts of big industries as there is in the smaller indy outfits. There was a general awareness in the room that there isn't a climate crisis and a biodiversity crisis and a water crisis – there is one crisis, and a lot of people are trying to find holistic solutions. Big business may be behind the curve, but there's a lot of shoving and heavy lifting going on. Issues like exploitative labour markets are seen as much a part of the problem as dirty energy or degraded landscape, and this has got to be positive.



Is all this good enough? I very much doubt it. It's slower and smaller than we need. There is still too much emphasis on initiatives for consumers and investors, and not as citizens or neighbours. There is too much emphasis on small moves by individuals, and not enough on structural change. And there was no mention at all of the axis of evil that is the disruption from the inordinately wealthy and powerful who are simply looking after their own interests and be damned the rest of us. But I am hoping that if you punch enough holes in a dyke, the water behind will

demolish the whole rotten thing. I don't see me losing my anti-capitalist principles any time soon, and you can bet I am going to keep on pushing, but I am no longer convinced that all is lost because we haven't won yet.

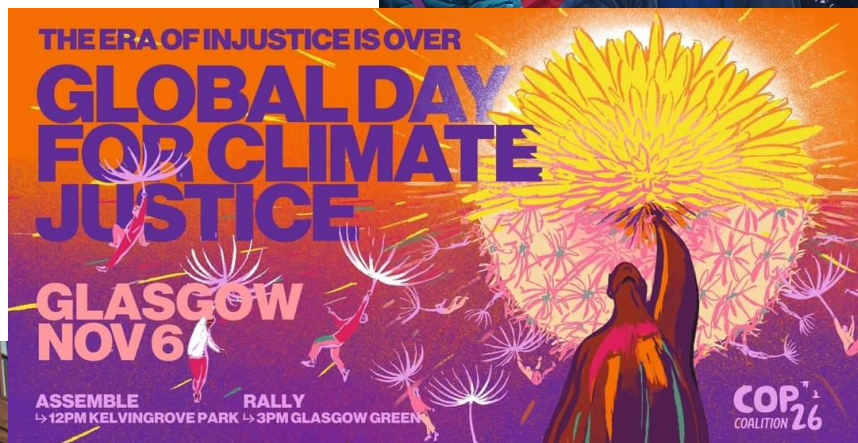
We read our poems at the start of each conference session and they went down well with the audience. The feedback from some was that this was the best conference they had attended and that the poetry and music added an unexpected element to the day.

Garry Charnock, RSK's Director, Climate Change and Sustainability, said afterwards,



'Geopoetics added a completely new dimension to our *Live from COP26* event in Glasgow and we are keen to build on our relationship with all the poets and the Scottish Centre.'

Dr Alan Ryder, RSK's CEO and founder added, 'Protecting the environment and supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals is driving our business strategy and the creativity introduced by Geopoetics really inspires our thinking.'



Caroline Watson, Photographs, Glasgow 2021

COP in or COP out?

Norman Bissell

Is COP26 a COP out
or a COP in?
Only time and the Earth's species will tell.

What does COP stand for?
Clare Balding asked me
Rambling on Seil one morning
for Radio Four
— and I didn't know!

Countries trying to agree
how to tackle the climate crisis
I muttered as a seal answered for me
swimming under Clachan Bridge
like some lost torpedo.

Protecting the Earth's sea life and reefs
as much as humans and land masses
as an antlered roe deer appeared,
grazing unconcerned in the garden
of the Tigh an Truish.

At Poldoran, the pool of the otter,
we discussed how slate was formed
and how dolerite intrusions
from the Mull volcano sixty million years ago
stretched all the way to Hadrian's Wall.

We spoke about time running out
for life on our precarious planet
and how COP stands for Conference of the Parties
under the United Nations Framework
Convention on Climate Change.

Quite a mouthful for sure, but
it all comes down to urgent actions
to save life on Earth
from the disastrous effects
of global warming.

A Villanelle for the Bees and Birds

Sarah Tremlett
(after Dylan Thomas)

Let us save the bees and birds
Do not give in to the powers that be
Rage, rage against the dying of our world

Governments sleeping with chemical lords
Should wail at night, as the poisons release
Let us save the bees and birds

Good people march for the green swards
Defend the butterflies, the lichen, the ancient trees
Rage, rage against the dying of our world

The biosphere cries – we must inherit the earth
swarming lavender left barren or priceless legacy
Let us save the bees and birds

Human 'profit' leaves no refund or reserve
Nature's saboteurs' lined pockets drag them to their knees
Rage, rage against the dying of our world

Developers you who are blinded by your greed
'Green stuff' no currency for the green you see
Let us save the bees and birds
Rage, rage against the dying of our world

“Re-Weaving the Basket of Community”

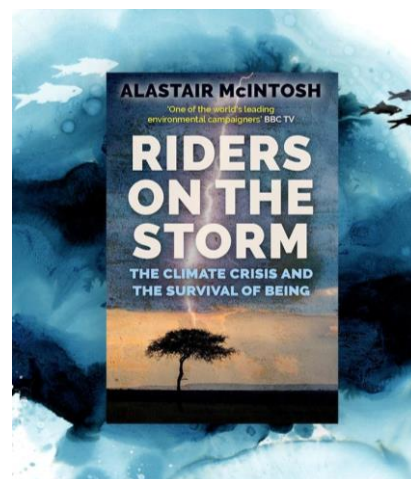
Ullrich Kockel

Academics are acutely aware that making sustainable development relevant ‘on the ground’ requires adapting our scientific disciplines to the languages and cultures of diverse communities, and finding ways of developing capabilities, such as climate literacy, in these communities ‘from the bottom up’. But we do need to tread carefully in doing so. It is often unclear who exactly ‘the community’ are, and from which ‘bottom’ upward development should take place. Yet without a sense of authentic heritage, individuals are alienated.

Drawing on insights from different cultures gained over many years of working with local communities, the human ecologist Alastair McIntosh’s book *Riders on the Storm: The Climate Crisis and the Survival of Being* explores how we might be able to recover the terms of ecologically well-grounded being, employing them creatively to grow resilient, socially, and culturally sustainable communities.

From the forests of New Guinea to Scotland’s Western Isles, Alastair McIntosh studies the often intricate ways that humans have been living in and with their world. Underpinning this quest is one of the defining questions of our times: What does climate change actually mean for us? Carefully attentive to the complexities of the human spirit, Alastair writes in an accessible, almost conversational style, yet his analysis is based on solid scientific evidence, thus leaving the reader with a deeper understanding of our life on and with this planet.

Looking back at COP26, held in Glasgow from 31st October to 12th November, one may ask what Scotland’s distinctive contribution might be to tackling ‘the climate crisis and the survival of being’. From his long



experience with land and local development trusts, Alastair tells of encounters between a group of elders from Papua New Guinea, whom he had brought to Scotland, and community initiatives in Lewis and Harris. In relating this experience, Alastair outlines a vision, and the basis for a sense of hope and action, that we may share across the cultures of the world. In Lewis and Harris, as elsewhere in Scotland, we can observe community resilience in action, working from the bottom up. The Papuans were introduced to Community Land Scotland, an umbrella group advising on community buyouts, and met a businessman who identified four elements needed to turn around a community, which are worth quoting here: political will at local and national government levels; technical support to cover any initial gaps in a community; financial support to get things going in the early days; and, most importantly, community desire. This desire, more than anything, can provide the vital impetus for what Alastair describes with a beautiful metaphor as ‘re-weaving the basket of community’. But the metaphor is not simply a romantically aesthetic one – a basket is made up of different elements, each with its place in the weave, and a specific role to play in making the weave beautiful, durable, and fit for purpose. The togetherness of these elements is what enables communities to live authentically and sustainably, riding on the storm towards

1 www.alastairmcintosh.com

The Bees

Anne Shivas

Small winged workers,
your wellbeing threatened
by heat, fertility cut
by forty-one per cent

for a single degree rise.
Sweet drones of summer,
numbers reduced,
habitat destroyed by fire,

flood, wind, desertification.
Essential workers of our food
chain, busy bringers of pollen,
bussed in billions from blueberries

to almonds to apples.
Your health impacted
by low snow pack.
Seasonal flux

brings poor nutrition, brings
poor defences against diseases.
Small winged workers,
four thousand species

across this land,
some now extinct
within your original range.
Poor nutrition brings

poor defences against diseases.
A bee born without wings.
A bee without wings
is a sad thing to be born.

Beckoned by Some Sense that Anticipates Dawn

Anne Shivas

Give me a dress of this dear blue, green and gold place,
cloud wrapped, it's endless days where sometimes evening
never ends and wheat fields shimmer, wave like silk in the wind.
A cloak of late magical summer light that gives wheat

a glow, buildings glisten, and sunrise at three am., gold
flooding the North Sea with eastern glitter. Thank you, dear earth
for late nights heading home at midnight, sun-down but soon to rise,
being woken by some sense that anticipates dawn, beckoned out

to the beach to witness the glory, for June hours lying on thick
green and spongy grass or coastal machair, pinpricked with tiny multi-
colored flowers, looking into the sky, the far transparent blue of the lift,
cows on the beach slow-munching seaweed, for the calm of endless time

and places for day-long walks, picnics by streams. Thank you for foxgloves,
puffins and gannets, apples eaten on grassy banks, distant hills blue in August haze,
light puddling on roads, salt-edged breezes, long paddles on beaches, strawberries
and raspberries, eaten warm from the punnet, green gooseberries picked

and rhubarb dipped in eggcups of sugar, for blackbird's fluting evening song,
summer day-sleeps, the bubble and gurgle of a hillside stream, for seals, their grey heads lifted,
turning, watching our walk, for beach fires with friends, songs
and laldie late towards night, fishing boats ploughing the sea, black silhouettes

fronting a fiery sky. Thank you for sunset-moonrise, morning swims, terns whistling, hovering and
diving in shallows, for the constant hum of bees around garden flowers and purple heather, small
shoals of silver fish seen in the clear green beside the harbor wall, long hours on warm sand, for
the cool drip of coastal caves to explore,

for red-dark sandstone rocks felted with thick damp green, so many grasses
feathered or brushed, knee-high, for the swish of cow's tails, the long attenuating moo,
the clunk of oars in oarlocks, hours spent in rowing boats, the coconut smell of gorse,
honey of summer roses. Thank you for the grit of heated sand on bare feet,

rockpools full of buckies, blood-red sea anemones, the drench
of summer showers, for quiet days climbing high towards the sky,
for so much time and space, our blessed freedom in this radiance.



Caroline Watson, *Along the Horizon With or Without Us*, Mixed materials on paper, 56x76 cm.

Kenneth White, Nomadism and Geopoetics

Philip Tonner

In his *The Wanderer and his Charts* (2004) Kenneth White offers two texts that serve at once to “educate and to initiate” (Bissell 2005: 37) his readers into his project, a lifetime in the making: in one of these texts he introduces us to ‘The Nomadic Intellect’ while in the other he provides ‘An Outline of Geopoetics’. The term ‘geopoetics’ – which is not to be confused with ‘geopolitics’ – started to enter into White’s work at the end of the 1970s, after a long period of what he describes as intellectual nomadism. He adopted this term in order to articulate not only a field that was opening up in his own intellectual trajectory but also to outline a potential space that would be ‘concerned with the cultivation of a live and life-enhancing world by self-developing individuals’ (White 2003: vii & 6). These two texts are connected in multiple ways. One of these connections is their shared engagement with the thinking of Friedrich Nietzsche, who White reads as a liminal figure, existing outside norms, conventions, and who intimated the inhuman in human thought. To Nietzsche’s council, ‘Brothers, remain true to the earth’, White will add Rimbaud’s declaration, ‘If I have taste left for anything at all, it is for earth and stones’ (White quotes both these lines in White 2003: 15). It was Nietzsche that created the concept of the philosopher-artist, the figure that becomes the poet-thinker in White’s hands, a figure immersed in the field of their immediate experience, engaged in the task of articulating the sound of the ‘universal symphony’ (White 2004: 238).

The philosopher-artist can be a solitary traveller, an intellectual nomad, a wayfarer, who is opened out on to something non-human by virtue of that very nomadism. They move out beyond the history of Western

metaphysics into a ‘new intellectual-existential geography’ (White 2004: 238). The ‘white poetics’ that Kenneth White entered into, as Craig has identified, brings him into the nomadic tradition of thinkers in Europe who sought to reconceptualise the relationship of modern thought to the history of Western culture. Thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida, in France, who stand within a field of concerns that can be ‘traced to the influence of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and through Heidegger to the Nietzsche by whom White was obsessed in his early years as a student in Glasgow’ (Craig 2018: 236). Intellectual nomads expound a ‘moving poetics’ (White 2004: 16) that articulates, in Bergson’s words, ‘the mobility of which the stability of life is made’ (Bergson 1946: 127). Such a poetics has what White has called an ‘Atlantic poetics’ (White 2004: 125). Ultimately, what White strives for is a ‘relationship of configurational complicity with the cosmological ‘poetics’ of the universe’ (White 2004: 241).

Geopoetics is, as White says, Novalis’s speaking of ‘a ‘writing of the earth’ that can be found in birds’ wings, on shells, in clouds, in snow, on mountain sides, in plants, in animals, in the lights of the sky, and which can be integrated into the language of human being’ (White 2004: 241). It is MacDiarmid’s, and I quote, ‘descrying, out on this stony limits, from the heights of a raised beach, a field few in the English-language context had any notion of and into which he often, cogently and beautifully, enters’ (White 2004: 242).

As Bissell has suggested, one way to approach White is as a ‘poet-teacher’ (Bissell 2005: 26) who endeavoured to retain the

freedom to come and go. As a poet-teacher White is placed somewhere in the long cultural line of Scoto-Celtic monks, and later medieval and Renaissance wandering Scottish scholars, the *Scotus vagans*, who left Scotland for Europe, but, who nevertheless took a great deal of their home country with them (see White 1998: 87), and who can be considered examples of the nomadic intellect, an intellect that, as Cairns Craig has reconstructed it in his recent *The Wealth of the Nation* (2018), refuses to be incorporated into the 'fixed structures of an existing society'. The nomadic intellect always seeks to maintain something that transcends history. Indeed, it aims to keep open 'an alternative space that counteracts history' (White 1998: 107). Nomadic intellectuals are 'untimely' in the Nietzscheo-Deleuzian sense of being able to create new 'lines of flight' 'along which things happen and changes take place' (Patton 2000: 10). Their untimely power was to disrupt their own time and also ours. Such intellectuals are, of course, located within a context but as untimely they gesture toward 'a new time and a new epoch' (Colebrook 2002: 63). Untimely nomads provoke cultural learning: they are its catalyst.

The nomadic voice enters in and out of our hearing in line with the crises of civilization:

The figure I call the intellectual nomad...is the bearer of at least the beginnings of new language and new space. He has broken his way out of the labyrinth and moves in what may at first seem a void, but which is perhaps the high-energy field in which could emerge a (new) world, (White 2004: 15).

Pelagius, Erigena, Michael Scot, Duns Scotus, the entire 'Pelagian line' (White 1996: 57), figures whose thought bordered, in one way or another, on the disruptive untimely power of the heretical, might speak again in service of a 'post-colonial Scotland' that would

emerge from Alba or a Scotland "un-cruddled". Alba, on this view, is an archaic ground, a 'past in the present' (Bishop 2012: 38). It is a support for a renewed creativity that draws inspiration from the landscape and that would engender a new geography and a new "earth-writing", that is at once a cultural archaeology, unearthing the forces of creativity that link seemingly discrete environments (such as the Siberian shamanic and Japanese Zen) while also exploring actual territories. Territories that have, as White has put it, resisted the 'autobahn of Western Civilization' (White 1998: 91). Transcendence is, for White, best conducted, 'at the margins of the defined territory of the nation' (Craig 2018: 233). From such a plateau poetry should transcend individual consciousness and reach out into a "growing cosmos, a literal Uni-verse" (White 1998: 142) in order to speak of 'a beautiful whole in movement' (White 1998: 58).

When it comes to the Scottish mind, White suggests, it is the trace of the Bible (in its 1611 version) that has perhaps marked it most over the course of the last four centuries. In fact, the Bible can, when approached from the perspective of a certain joyful science (*gai savoir*; see White 1989: 7), provide a 'good introduction to nomadism' (White 2004: 7), especially in its Old Testament, which is a book of 'beginnings' based 'largely on a dialectic of nomadism and sedentarization' (White 2004: 7). Sedentary and nomadic, Cain and Abel: nomads have to sustain themselves as they proceed. Abel, the nomad, whose name means something like "the useless wind", moved out through the wilderness from well to well (White 2004: 7). The well-being of the pastoral nomad depends upon a network of wells, a network that composes their territory. Cain, the sedentary, builds the first town and names it after his son, 'Tubal-Cain' (White 2004: 7). It is with Cain that the human being becomes the 'townsman, a citizen, a maker of history, a constructor of enclosed culture' (White

2004: 7). But, it is Abel that Jahweh prefers: nomadism is the more radical of these two tendencies because it opens the human onto the non-human.

It is not hard to hear in these two tendencies an echo of the forces identified by Nietzsche in his early work *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Dionysian and the Apollonian that when combined in Ancient Greece produced tragedy. In this early work, which was ready shortly after his brief service as a medic in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, but was not published until 1872, the Dionysian force is associated with intoxication and ecstasy, literally, 'being-outside-of-oneself' (Burnham 2015: 102). It is associated with lyric poetry and music and embodies the Schopenhauerean metaphysics of a dynamic Will underlying appearances. Cultural products, such as epic poetry, architecture and sculpture, are associated with the force of the Apollonian. In the Apollonian the beautiful arts are accompanied by a cheerfulness and embody the Schopenhauerean metaphysics of individuation. But the Apollonian is not deluded: it is aware of the illusory nature of these individuated forms and is later conceptualised by Nietzsche as a calm moment of stillness within the dynamics of the Dionysian (Burnham 2015: 24). The Schopenhauerean Dionysian drives to leave Apollonian individuated appearances behind and 'ecstatically sink back into the original oneness of the will' (Burnham (2015: 340).

Cain's wandering was wandering as punishment: White's was a wandering of necessity born of habit. In 'A Shaman Dancing on the Glacier' he tells us of his experience in the very late 1950s of finding Mircea Eliade's book *Shamanism – The Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Payot 1951) when he was 'wandering around the streets and backstreets of Paris' (White 1998: 35). His explorations of his inner reality at this time induced in him many flashbacks to his

childhood on the West Coast of Scotland where, when he was about eleven or twelve years old, he became much concerned with a territory he called "up the back" (White 1998: 36). In his reading of Eliade White realised that what he had been up to up the back amounted to 'a kind of home-made shamanism' (White 1998: 37). The shaman is a 'dawn-man', as the Ojibwa of North America call him, who seeks an ecstasy, a getting outside of one's self and of history; a 'de-conditioning' (White 1998: 38). Through this ecstatic experience, this transcendence within immanence, the shaman attains the capacity to experience and express 'total life' (White 1998: 38). Through this the shaman comes to know an identity larger than their socially coded one and by virtue of this he is enabled 'to do the greatest good to the community, by giving it breathing space' (White 1998: 38). The total experience of the earth is a luminous experience: uranian and telluric, which may be expressed by deities but can also be 'de-theologised' and 'reduced to 'white light'' (White 1998: 38). Real poetry, for White, will reach out into an experience of the earth as an experience of its incandescence, its 'whiteness' (White 1998: 64): 'Poetry signifies the transcendence of the individual conscience and the introduction to a world (a cosmos, a beautiful whole in movement)' (White 1998: 58). The rational animal must re-become the '*animal poeticum*, in harmony with the *logos*; not a victim of his (degraded) environment, but an inhabitant of his world' (White 1998: 65).

Returning to the two works by White that I invoked at the start of this paper, and to begin to draw things to a close: both works are also connected by an engagement with the medieval Scottish philosopher and theologian John Duns Scotus and with the Twentieth Century German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Scotus, whose epitaph reads, 'Scotland bore me, England received me, France taught me, Cologne in Germany holds me', appears as an intellectual nomad

when he takes a line contrary to the doctrine of the analogy of being that was particularly associated with St Thomas Aquinas. Scotus argues for the univocity of the concept of being, a concept of being predicable of everything that is, whether that thing be finite or infinite, just as it is, in so far as it opposes nothingness. Hugh MacDiarmid, when speaking from a 'raised beach' will invoke Scotus's concept of *haecceitas*, a radical singular that appears in anything and everything, in a stone on a beach, in the singular intense 'whiteness' of some white thing, in the individuation that is 'you'. For White, Scotus 'is a wanderer at the limits who opens up an unedited space of thought' (White 2004: 13).

Scotus was also a key influence on the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, who said of him that he was 'Of realty the rarest-veined unraveler; a not Rivalled insight, be rival Italy or Greece; Who fired France for Máry without spót' (Manley Hopkins 1986: 142). Hopkins, by sheer coincidence, died in the year 1889, the year in which that other crucial reader of Scotus, Martin Heidegger, was born. Heidegger wrote his post-doctoral teaching qualification on Scotus and it is there that he says of him that his:

striking individuality as a thinker characterizes him in general as having unmistakably modern traits. He has a more extensive and accurate nearness (*Haecceitas*) to real life, to its manifoldness and possible tensions than the scholastics before him...he knows how to turn...from the fullness of life to the abstract world of mathematics (Heidegger 1978: 15)

For White, Scotus is a key figure in the advent of a new way of thinking and being. A way of thinking and being that White called 'geopoetics'. Geopoetics stands for nothing less than the attempt to open new cultural spaces all over the world. Spaces of

education, spaces of self-cultivation. The intellectual nomad, the geopoetician, passes through the many cultures of the world and integrates aspects of them into a 'new coherence' replete with local colourations (White 2004: 247). The unity of geopoetics is not continental: it is the unity of the archipelago. Geopoetics's concern is with the condition of the human being in the universe, with the human being and planet Earth, with what White calls a 'presence-in-the-world' that experiences a field and a territory and that, with an openness of style, tunes in to the very "'poetics' of the universe' (White 2004: 241). Heidegger is another 'affluent to geopoetics' (White 2004: 239) who 'steps out of philosophy' into "beginning thinking" (White 2003: 29).

For both White and Heidegger poetry shouldn't be thought of as just words on a page. The poetic takes place in language because 'language preserves the original nature of poetry' which is 'the setting-into-work of truth' (Heidegger 1971: 74). For White, the depth dimension of poetry is revealed in that it is the very responsiveness to the world wherein the 'mind cries out for unity, for a unitive experience...an ecstatic existence, expanding to a sense of cosmic unity' (White 1998: 60-64; see also Craig 2018: 235). Poetry, in this sense, is extra-linguistic: the poetic is revealed in 'a sheer experience of the nakedness and loveliness of everything' (White 1998: 64). The poetic is ecstatic precisely because it opens us up beyond the humdrum categories of thought. Kenneth White sees himself as a modern day 'Scotus vagans', an intellectual nomadic, a geopoetician concerned with 'the state of the human being in the universe, the relationship between human being and the planet Earth' (White 2004: 244). The trajectory of Scotus, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, MacDiarmid and Kenneth White will instead open us up toward the extra-categorical radical singularity of things; towards their 'thisness', their *haecceitas*. Such an experience circumvents

the abstracting 'function of language' (Craig 2018: 235) and points to an original approach to the world as meaningful. As Hölderlin said and as Heidegger agrees: *poetically, man*

dwells on this earth. The "white world" is where 'poetry and metaphysics meet' (White 1998: 179).

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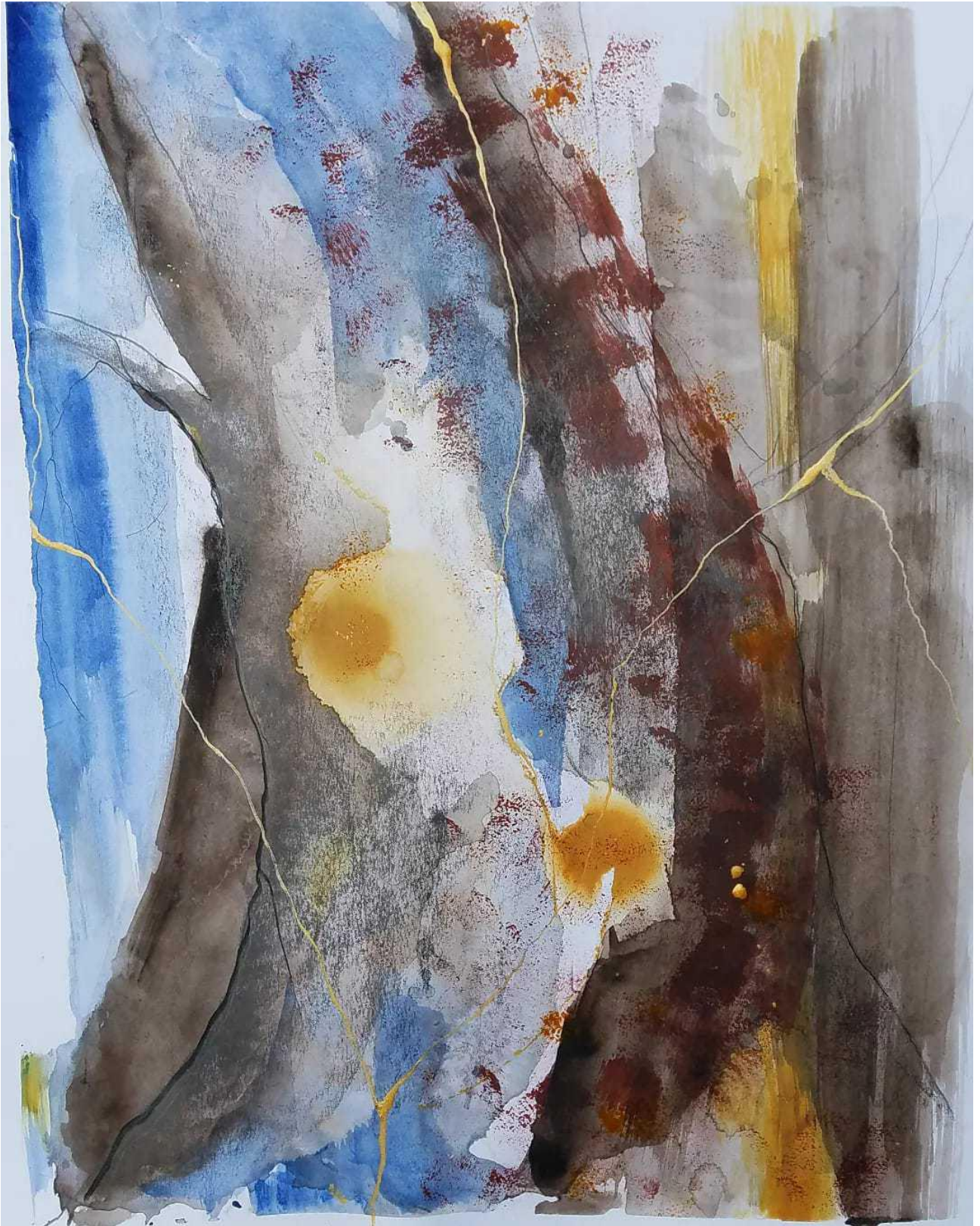
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Dina Fachin, *Tales From the Past*, watercolor, ink, ink marker, quill pen, salt, and graphite on paper, 17 x 24 in, 2022



Dina Fachin, *Fortune Teller*, watercolor, ink, ink marker, quill pen, salt, and graphite on paper, 17 x 24 in, 2022

How to Get to a secret lough

Charlie Gracie

The road from Glenade church and up past the houses there. The farmers have signs to say keep out and private road and the like. Ignore them. Tell them you're a McGloin and you'll be fine. It's a bad road, pot-holed and half patched and worse the more you go. Just beyond the last of the brambles, heavy with un-ripened fruit, a gate that you'll hardly be able to open without farmer's arms. Jump over that and spludge in the mud, it's the best way. Then, every tree and bush is gone, it is land now for sheepshite and grass. What track there is, is gravelly, the nature grabbing back charge. It is hard to find the Green Road, but that's what you need to do. It is a thing you breathe in, rather than locate, a thing you'll know you're at when you're there. The track: now that would wind and wind you round and get you lost in the far glen. Work your legs, up and up the scree. That'll be you on the Green Road, the road to the crags. There's hardly a space between them for a one to get to the top of the mountain, hardly a crack in their black teeth to let you through. But somewhere, when you are right tight under them, you'll see the way. The green flat top of the mountain flops over and winks, come on boyo.

In one place, in all the cragginess,
there is a space for you to climb.
And once you've climbed, to sit.

To sit in the softness of heathery moss.
Moss and heather and the wind that flies from off the sea.
The sea in the distance, with Saint John's Point beyond,
and the wildness of Mullaghmore.

You can sit there and love it all. Then, not to dally long for the fear of hill mist, you tread large steps, the ups and downs of boggy land are such that you need to do that. Little steps don't work up here. Cut round the edge of the mountain, the black crags now invisible to you. There is no direction to go except around the mountain. The ups and downs of it. The edge of it to follow. Truskmore, Tievebaun, they appear, their own distant green above their own crags, sweeps of moss and rock. The lough, a lochan I'll call it in my Scottishness, is not anywhere up here until it appears, sudden as sunshine, in a glimpse beyond the rise of heather and bog cotton. From the corner of my eye it is, then gone as soon as I make over to it. There it's back now, a real thing, a faerie breath of a thing, a geological and pluvial creation. It sits in the shallow cradle of Arroo Mountain. The far end meets the sky. Then nothing but distant Leitrim hills.

sky reflected in flat calm
a fly buzzes in cotton grass
I lie here and sleep

On Benbulbin

Charlie Gracie

Ancient

the chortle call of choughs
flickering out over peat hags
fairies in the bog-lit mountain

Civil War

A step from Bulben to Wiskin
to something un-named
hands wrung, blood-saddened

Meadow Pipit

A swirl-chirp blurring above
the height of the mountain. Silence
blasts out below

Yeats

In the green expanse of Sligo
a river wanders through
the footprints of ancient forts

Leaving

behind you, beyond the whins
a Council of Craggs
in the softening sun

On Benwischen

Charlie Gracie

Rocks, grass, sphagnum. A drizzled scatter of
crows
in the multi-grey sky, black to grey-black to
all the softness
of greys and the whitened edges of clouds.

Sun wetly threatened in distant pale blue.

The pink shell of a mountain snail.

Tiny white star of Pearlwort.



Stone

Mandy Haggith

When I die, I don't want a stone on my grave. I will leave no descendants to remember me and I am willing to rot away forgotten. I mark my presence here on earth, here in Assynt, daily, with graphite or ink on paper. If my words survive me, I won't need a stone to show I'm still here, anyway.

But most people seem to want a stone with a name carved on it, marking above ground where their corpse or ashes or memories lie below. A signpost slab, like a doorway at the top of a staircase leading down into a subterranean place, a marker post to indicate where they passed, the body's termination point, the disembarkation station. A grave stone is the final full stop, the punctuation indicating the end of the lifeline, whether we believe there's anything beyond that point or not. Sometimes, like the marker on the grave of an unknown seaman, buried in Nedd graveyard, a stone speaks only of merciless forces of nature, but most gravestones carry a name, the label attached to the self in the final register, and sometimes some other words of love or images expressing who or what the person was.

Just by its presence, a gravestone answers the spatial question 'where?' with its mute, immutable 'here', but it cannot answer 'when?' unless numbers are engraved on it to represent the time spanned by the life of the person below. The stone itself is immune to time as we know it and however deeply the dates are carved it will try to slough them off, to blur their message of that particular human 'then' into the stone's almost immortal 'now'.

Stones defy time. They hold secrets of many long yesterdays and will continue to do so for countless tomorrows. They bridge across the lines we draw to cut our experience into palatable temporal chunks. They are neither dead nor alive, neither sleeping nor awake, neither bodies nor spirits. Shape and texture are the stone ways of being: mineral hardness, moveable stillness, engravable inertia.

Defiance of time is not the same thing as refusal to change. Stones are all works in progress, on easeful journeys from rock to dust. From their origins in earth-core fire, they have been ground out and down by ice, water and air, or by earthquakes and rock

slides, as they meander from mountain, via boulder and pebble, down to grit. They will wash or blow away, then settle, and slowly, very, very slowly, become rock again.

Stones mark and memorialise but do not remember, at least not in human timescales. We cannot carbon date a stone artefact: its age is the age of its minerals, which are as old as the earth, or the age of its formation from ground-up even older stones in the bed of some ancient lake or sea. They may retain traces of geological trauma from the distant past but they are silent about such brevities as human history. A stone axe or cross can only be dated by means of carbon-based material found with it, such as charcoal in a midden or bones in a grave, or by analogy with other similar objects whose age are known.

Because it is moveable, stone can also keep secrets of place. The stone cross fragment found at Inchnadamph, for example, may, by analogy with similar crosses from further south, have been carved as early as the eighth century and possibly carried to Assynt from Argyll by early Christians. Alternatively, it might be a fake made as late as the 1800s from rock just a few miles away at Clachtoll. We may never know.

There is a near-sphere in the basement of the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, which was found somewhere in 'Sutherlandshire'. It has three faces carved on it, and a dip in the crown of their single head. It's a marvellous mystery, the only thing like itself found in the north, made of a granite that is similar to some in Norway. Could it have come here as an erratic carried by an ancient glacier, before being picked up by its engraver? Or was it made in Norway and brought by a Viking? We will never know where or when it was carved, but its form, the tricephalos, was a cult among warrior Celts, hundreds of years before Vikings arrived in Scotland. Two thousand years ago,

Celts liked to make symbols of the heads they took as trophies. This one has droopy moustaches and smiles like Confucius. Their triple mystery – what, where and when – remains their inscrutable secret. They do what stones do well. A stone won't rot like a spiked head. Your dog can't crunch it like bone. It will continue. It will carry a story on, though not necessarily in a language that will remain in use.



By defying time, unlike almost all the wood, cloth and food that rots away, stones remain like beacons from the past, hinting to us about lives lived long ago. Stone relics of past people are vital archaeological evidence for those people's lives. The tiny sharpened flint fragments known as microliths have revealed themselves as tools of Mesolithic (mid stone age) people. Bigger axes come from older, cruder times, and built structures like standing stones (megaliths), henges and cairns, indicate more recent, new stone age or Neolithic people.

Some stones must have been special. Gems like amber and jade have travelled far from where they were taken from the ground, raising questions about human values. Did the early people make tiny sharpened blades for weapons out of quartzite because, like contemporary dwellers of Arnhemland, they believed them to be the petrified bones of ancestors, imbued with a spiritual power that would help them to hunt and kill animals, or

just because they were easy to sharpen? Did the cairn builders drag quartzite boulders from the mountains to bring a lunar shine within their shrine, or just so that their bright white constructions would impress the neighbours?

Because of the obstinate nature of the stuff, stone pieces and configurations remain as our most tangible signs of past lives. From dykes, houses and barns, through millstones and querns, down to tools and jewellery, stonework blurs on long after its users are silenced. It shouts loud and clear using industrial terms still current in the economy, through marble quarried at Ledbeg or the harbour breakwater made of tonnes of gneiss and sandstone boulders. It echoes with past labours too, in old fishing traps like the one close to Lochinver post office, once-labyrinthine sheep fanks like those up the Clachtoll peat track, at Glencanisp or Beannach, the hidden illicit still at Ardroe and the ruined limestone kiln and grinding stone at Achmore.

In sheer volume, walls best show up people's labour. For thousands of years folk have been heaving boulders into lines, so as to keep livestock on one side or the other but just as much to use the rock's power of declamation to announce 'mine' to the world. You can stake a cow out of a cornfield or chase deer away with dogs, but a dyke declares possession. Walls are all about power and posterity. They delimit holdings. They are visible representations of land tenure, defining relationships between people, in particular those on the inside versus those left out. Walls describe arcs in space that express a feeling of the need for a place of safety: they speak of the insecurity of those inside, of their fear of the dangerous folk 'out there'.

Many of the stones in this land are thresholds and boundary markers, etching lines of difference that we no longer comprehend. The chambered cairns at

Ledbeg, Ledmore and Loch Ailsh are eerie crossover places between who knows what conceived-of realms. How distant or close were the living and dead, people and spirits, ancestral family and the as-yet unborn? The cairns stand, more or less rubbled, raided or turfed over, clusters of stone or mounds too round to be drumlins or moraines of ice-decay. They occupy the edges of old fields, where complex underlying geological transitions are overlaid with millennia of changing land uses, creating seams between patches of different kinds of vegetation and soil, lined by ditches and streams. The cairns echo the forms of barrier mountains. They overlook river valleys that carve the land into zones and quarters, into territories of otherness.

The cairns stand like portals from our time



into the past, questioning the flux and flurry of human-induced change along the centuries, mocking the traffic teeming by at 60-miles-an-hour, intent on elsewhere and oblivious to the past. They are thresholds from what we know to what we may never remember. Each stone remains silent on the many roles it has been rolled into during the last few thousand years.

The stones stand: so many, so varied, so hard. We understand so little about them, and in that mystery there is wonder.

A Lithograph of Time

Alyson Hallett

If you want to give me something for solstice
give me a clock that's made of stone or rock.

Give me a time machine that will tell time
as it is for the planet, the universe, the galaxy.

A way of telling that boldly unfolds a drift of
coccoliths, stars and continental plates.

A time piece that isn't tethered to hours
but dares to hold millennia in its grain.

I don't want a day to stretch from beginning
to end, I don't want to think there's a way

of saying lives travel in straight lines or that
the living and dead aren't strictly entwined.

Give me a clock that neither counts or uncounts
but pulses with perpetual process.

Give me pebbles, granite, gravel. Give me
mica or a tiny drop of comet-blasted glass.

At the End of Eoligarry

Helen Boden

there's an even ancients landscape
 known as Scurrial Point
where an unstable earth warped up again
 the gneisses laid down,
folded them back on themselves into a diagram
 of their own pressurisation,
exposing raised veins and roughened stone
 to unremitting battering of millennia of waves.

Sore from the strain of relentless defiance, this formed
 the severe westward face of an island.
It seems and could be a point of no return,
 though out to sea's another prospect:
the horizon bows out into the Atlantic
 describes a generous arc between
Greian head and Balranald, a theatre in the round
 where the water that weathered
and pulverised and forged a beaten corner,
 for once at ease this evening, bends
into something more straightforward.

A short stride back across the isthmus
meadows, unmown to encourage the corncrake,
 face the back of Uist over a shallower strand
where tides seep, year on year stealth-transforming
 a more compliant shore. This Janus-faced
northern reach of Barra is, and is not, a metaphor.

Unconformities

Helen Boden

Up a track from the wide road that was quarried
for access to the vegetable processing plant:
at the land edge, *that* slant of rock, the one
that tells the truth to the North Sea of how long
it took to get this far. These are the strata that once
gave lie to creation myth, replaced what was thought,
until that point, about how Earth formed

with a fresh wonder, recreated each time you see
down these headland metres into deep time,
or scan the onshore skyline beyond Siccar Point
for promontories that recede on repeat away east
(in this mist is the farthest one a ghost?).

Reach a new understanding, if understanding
is the word, of sea, and rock, of phases, ages.
In the lie of land that rolls seawards,
how this almost-Lothian fringe
of the Borders was folded and has weathered.

Back from the clifftop, a dyke that separates
grazing land from rough ground
is built from greywacke, and red, sandstone, both -
rocks from either side of the time divide, laid down
65 million years apart. Today what separates
sheep from goats betokens a border that gives,
and gives, tells how we could break here
with all notion of convention and our pasts.

A Sudden Strangeness

Susan Holliday

*Confronting climate change on her doorstep, psychotherapist Susan Holliday
unearths the hidden depths of a 'second nature'*

A muffling of snow has fallen overnight. The allotments are transfigured. A light drift of flakes still plays its unhurried way from heaven to earth, lost in its own reverie like an unwatched child. Through this most gentle of alchemies every blade, every branch, rooftop and fencepost is gathered into a single seamless garment. Edges, distinctions and differences soften into an inviolate whole. Looking out from my bedroom window, a tumble of joy fonts inside me, sparkling and splashing its brightness onto my threadbare heart. It is Sunday 24 January 2021. We are in our third pandemic lockdown.

In the street at the front of the house small family groups are already crunching and snowballing their way to the park. Abandoned cars lie still and quiet, rendered into strange and ethereal shapes by the pristine blanket of snow. Instead of their chugging, belching and revving, all I can hear is the sound of children, voices bright as bells in the cleared air.

Through the wrought iron gates of the park I walk into a Breughel painting. A tracery of unclad oaks stand silhouetted against the ice green sky. Clusters of jewel bright jackets, scarves and gloves stud the white wooded slopes. Each group of figures moves across the stage in an unscripted choreography, curling, sliding and hurling. In amongst them snowmen of various sizes spring up like mushrooms, their wonky heads and bodies testament to the exuberant creativity of the moment. The sense of collective joy and wonder is palpable.



Richmond Park, 24 January 2021

In our ever-warming winters snow rarely seems to last long these days, at least in the southern lowlands. By mid-afternoon all that remains of this transfigured world are mounds of sullied slush. Walking home through the disenchanting streets, I feel the deadweight of miscarried promise.

In the days following this snow-graced hiatus, my heart is heavy with a dull ache which feels baffling and unwarranted. I'm surprised to find how intensely these few precious hours stand out in the felt sense of my recollection, like traces of a numinous dream. Something about the spontaneous collective emancipation of the human spirit which flowered on that other-wise morning has left an indelible mark. I am altered, bewildered and strangely bereft. A shepherd on the hillside asking myself 'what am I to make of this thing which has come to pass?'

At any other time of my life I might have turned straight back to the myriad of distractions which beckon from our endlessly tempting world, but in the quiet of lockdown and with time on my hands, it occurs to me that I could ponder my experience of the

snow, dwell on this 'happening' as though it were a dream or a poem. Perhaps, I think to myself, there is something here I need to see *through*.

*

Writing in the seventeenth century, Japanese haiku master Basho revealed that poetry is not just a way of writing about the natural world, it is a way of seeing it. Poetry unveils, lays bare, unfamiliar aspects around and within us, which we might otherwise overlook. Basho's distilled and enigmatic visions remind us that poetry is the experience of seeing into the heart, into the *deep nature*, of something. This seeing, he proposed, arises naturally in us when we become intimate with our subject:

*Your poetry issues of its own accord when
you and the object have become one
– when you have plunged deep enough
into the object
to see something like a glimmering there.ⁱ*

Poets articulate this glimmering truth precisely because they stay with the strange and the ineffable long enough for language to emerge from the depth of experience itself. They bear with being tongue-tied. This birthing of articulate vision, as Emerson reminds us, can test us to the core:

*Stand there, balked and dumb, stuttering
and stammering, hissed and hooted,
stand and strive, until at last rage draw
out of thee
that dream-power which every night
shows thee is thine own.ⁱⁱ*

The 'dream-power' of which Emerson speaks interests me. Well of course, you might say, I'm a psychotherapist after all. I have spent two decades working with men and women to unveil the glimmering which lies hidden beneath the surface of their lives. The source of numinous experience is not however, it seems to me, located solely in our individual unconscious. Dream-power is not a slight of

hand which happens when we 'lose consciousness' in sleep, but rather a psychological cosmos which is alive and ever-present in nature as a whole. Basho's glimmering depth animates the very ground of being. It is more conscious than we can begin to imagine.

This sense of psyche as 'second nature' is hard to grasp, for it's not so much a region in Freud's topographical sense, or even a dimension, but a vital and sovereign implicate order which exists in and for itself. These chthonic depths are not self-evident. They reveal themselves in response to the quality of our attention, when we see beyond the literal (the names), beneath the concrete certainty of knowing and through the opaqueness of matter.

As a psychotherapist, I have learned to see *through* the surface of experience from the practice of working with dreams. In his book 'The Dream and the Underworld', archetypal psychologist James Hillman cautions that what matters is not so much what is said about a dream, not the interpretation and dissection of its meaning, but 'the experience of the dream' during and after its happening. It follows from this that 'the golden rule in touching any dream is keeping it alive. Dream-work is conservation'.ⁱⁱⁱ We ponder our dreams (and our numinous experiences) not to unravel them, nor to take them apart, but to *gather* them into our hearts, to glean the fragments they leave behind into a ragged edged collage. Taking this further still, I suggest that it's what we *make* of these visions that potentially transforms everything.

We *under*-stand nature (both human and more than human) by immersing ourselves in the imaginal and sensate quality of experience. By plunging in we *feel* as well as see its quality. Cézanne articulates this tender vision when he advocates that the artist perceives through reading the 'two

parallel texts of nature. 'Nature seen and nature felt.'^{iv} And so this is how I begin to understand the transfiguration of that winter morning. I start by keeping alive the feelings those few hours have evoked in me. I savour the font of joy which sprang up on first encountering the drifts of snow through my bedroom window, the muffling of all other cares and concerns in a great silencing of internal chatter. I feel the tenderness in my heart on hearing the human intimacy of voices and feet in the street. I sense the radiance of connection which greeted me in the park, when for a few glorious hours every man, woman and child seemed to be woven into a single story. Nature and human nature conjoined. Then, recalling the walk home from the park, I allow myself to feel the dead weight of miscarried promise. I make space in my collage for a deep sadness. The more I attend to the sadness, the more important it feels, as though I have arrived at a doorway to understanding.

Sadness is so often the door we seek to close. We turn our backs on sorrow and rush off in search of gladness. Who among us chooses to stay with sadness, to become acquainted with its deep nature and purpose? In his 'Letters to a Young Poet' Rilke suggests 'perhaps somewhere, someplace deep inside your being, you have undergone important changes while you were sad'^v. Through the doorway of sorrow an unfamiliar and life-changing presence slips into the heart:

*The future enters us in this way in order to
be transformed in us long before it
happens.
And that is why it is so important to be
solitary and attentive when one is sad'.^{vi}*

What moves me about Rilke's insight is the way he presents sadness as *annunciation*. He suggests a sorrow that is neither bereavement, nor melancholy, not nostalgia, but a point of conception, an intimation of a deeper reality that seeks to be born. This

intimation requires from us a 'beholding', a kind of patient attending over time which allows the feeling to gestate and so to bear fruit in our awareness. Without this attending to sadness the change it has seeded in us risks being stillborn.

Rilke's notion of *attending* sits in stark contrast to the narcotic numbing and manic distraction which characterise our contemporary response to pretty much any feeling which is not 'happy'. 'Attend' shares its root with the word 'tender'. Both derive from the Latin *ad-tendere*, which means to 'stretch towards'. The idea of tenderness evokes the sense that something stretched becomes thin and so more vulnerable to the impressions of touch. Understood in this way, tender vision is essentially about stretching out beyond our pre-conceptions and leaning in towards the life-giving intelligence of experience. It is about allowing ourselves to become vulnerable so we might be touched by the *numen* of what is happening.

From the Latin stem *tendere*, we also find the French 'attendre', which gives us the sense of holding the moment of experience open in time. This lends a very different perspective to the notion of being a 'patient'. No longer the sick and damaged person in need of remedy, but the expectant human, pregnant with the possibility of insight. This art of seeing as gestation is beautifully articulated within the ancient art of *Sumi-e*. Painting with ink on paper, one brush stroke only is allowed for each mark. Exploratory sketching, revisions and decorations are not permitted. The preparation lies in the quality of looking. Through gestating the subject, sumi-e artists and poets seek to distill the essence of nature.

Writing in the eleventh century, Chinese poet and painter Master Sung Tung-Po encapsulated this patient vision, advising

‘before painting bamboo, it is necessary for it to grow in your soul’.



Sumi-e painting by contemporary German artist Rita Böhm

Pondering the unbidden sadness which has weighed heavily in me since that January morning, I realise that the feeling is not new. It has been seeded in my heart over and over again, through the innumerable times in my life that I have walked away from moments of wonder and intimation, allowing myself to be distracted, so that the promise of their conception turns to sullied slush.

It occurs to me that the ‘extinction of experience’ of which Robert Pyle first wrote in 1975, is not just the dislocation of urban communities from nature, but also the fact that we live in a world which consumes nature like fast food. We dip into wildness and then move on quickly to the next fix, the next distraction. We have our snowball fight and then hurry home, faces already turning away from the ice green sky and the melting world, back toward the small blue light of our phones. The revelations which reach towards us from the wild depths of nature do not swell in the belly of our imagination, do not seed in us a change of heart. This failure to ‘make something’ of our experiences of nature contributes perhaps to the contemporary epidemic of ‘depression’. Our deep nature proves itself to be alive within and around us, but through the myopic, literal and impatient condition of our seeing,

we forsake the earth’s life-giving poiesis. Our wonder and our sadness do not bear fruit because we do not ponder them in our hearts.

Could it be that the flat surface of our everyday experience is littered with doorways onto this deeper nature, portals which open under the warmth of attention to reveal an intimate, expansive and vital wellspring of creative possibility? Einstein proposed that the nature which we think we see is merely the ‘the tail of the lion’ which ‘cannot reveal himself to the eye all at once because of his huge dimension’.^{vii} This unfathomable realm of nature is not just out there in an ‘environment’, it is also in here, in the depths of everyday human experience. The roots of who we are lie hidden below the surface. Psyche is not merely buried in our history, but crowning right here and now, disturbing our equilibrium through wonder and sorrow.

We tend to think of psyche as immaterial, a subtle dimension more mind than matter which lies beyond the reach of our senses. It can be helpful to remember that the word ‘psyche’ originates in the Greek noun *psukhé*, meaning ‘breath’, and the verb *psykhein*, meaning ‘to blow’. Like the wind, which we discern through the rustle of leaves, or the ripple of water, psyche is revealed through the ways in which it touches and moves us. We register these currents through that most subtle of sensory organs, the ‘felt sense’ and we reveal them through the poetic language of *likeness*. ‘What does this feel like?’ I ask of my sadness, for every sadness has its own indigenous character and purpose. Plunging deep into its distinctive quality, I begin to understand that the telos of my sorrow has everything to do with this sense of a foundering of promise, an untended conception.

Holding open a space for my snow-seeded sorrow to gestate, I begin to recognise it as

the inverse face of all that is most dear to me: the muffled lightness of nature's grace (the way it offers up to us its promise of renewal without fanfare); the dissolution of the separateness of things so that each of us is gathered into one inviolate whole; the gloriously unselfconscious creativity that nature seeds within and around us. This perhaps is the gift of sorrow, that it illuminates what is of greatest worth. My responsibility to this ever-present glimmer of inner ground is above all to pause; to dwell; to glean, gather and heed; to understand - and so to cherish.

*

Harrowed through sorrow, our senses awaken to all that is budding, fledgling, sprouting and swelling moment to moment. These nascent dimensions of experience have yet to be bottled or labelled. If they are to surface into the light of our understanding, we must first learn to bear with blindness. We move from the solid ground of knowing and naming into a more tentative state characterised by faith in the *unforeseen*. There is an intensity to this un-knowing. For it's precisely when we are lost that we become most fully present. Untethered from signposts, charts and familiar landmarks, wits sharpen, instincts stir, senses begin to sniff for the scent of new horizons. We wander and we wonder. In this fissure of experience we don't even know what we are looking for. Our sole and solemn responsibility is to ponder 'this thing which has come to pass', to remain open to what our sorrow may *unearth*. This wondering is grounded in vulnerability and a willingness to encounter inconvenient truths. Perhaps this is why the word 'wonder' shares its roots with the German *Wunde*, meaning 'wound'.

Remembering the muffled stillness which greeted me from the allotments that morning, I recall some lines from Neruda's poignant poem 'Keeping Quiet', in which he suggests what might happen if we were to

'stop for once on the face of the earth' and 'not move our arms so much':

*Perhaps a huge silence
Might interrupt this sadness
Of never understanding ourselves
And of threatening ourselves with death.
Perhaps the earth can teach us
As when everything seems dead
And later proves to be alive.^{viii}*

Perhaps the earth can teach us. Yes. Could it be that the deep earth, with its seasonal cycles of plenty and of dearth, has everything to teach us. To heed its glimmering intelligence, we may need to 'not move our arms so much'. For once, we may need to do nothing but 'stand there, barked and dumb, stuttering and stammering', until we actually feel the swelling in us of nature's geopoiesis:

*It would be an exotic moment
Without rush, without engines,
We would all be together
In a sudden strangeness.^{ix}*

My favourite of all Christmas carols, *In the Bleak Midwinter*, draws us into a time when 'earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone', a time when 'snow had fallen snow on snow'. Like many of us confronting climate change on our doorstep, I ask myself 'what can I do?' The carol poses a similar question: '*what can I give Him, poor as I am. If I were a Shepherd I would bring a lamb, if I were a Wise Man I would do my part*'. I am neither shepherd nor wise man. As a psychotherapist committed to the rewilding of human nature, my offering to the earth in this moment of its desolation is simply this: to hold a creative space in which men and women of all backgrounds can safely ponder the 'sudden strangeness' of their *sorrow* and their *wonder*. Twenty years of tender encounter have convinced me that these two essentially human experiences are both doorways onto the glimmering depths of a second nature which is both human and more than human.

Seeing *through* nature with sensitive, subtle and intelligent attention, we light a fire. There is an ignition of love and will, which might, which could change everything. As Iain McGilchrist reminds us in his seminal book on perception:

The kind of attention we pay actually alters the world: we are literally partners in creation.^x



Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone

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On Meeting a Fisher at Balintore Harbour

Elaine Morrison

Sandstone sea walls
layer upon layer
memories of
ocean, life, land.

Empty crustacean shells
discarded by black-
backed gulls,
pounded by tides,
crushed to sand,
held in time.

Silurian fish scales
fleck quarried slab
carved with Pictish beast,
raised over beach
marking the grave
of three Norse princes
lured, lost
to the sea.

Folds of skin
layer upon layer
memories of
ocean, life, land.

Each wrinkle holds
lore, loss, love;
holds in place
North Sea eyes
that catch
sun and stars,
that shadow
storm clouds
foreboding
swells rise, recede.

Enduring harbour wall
and timeless fisher
greet with
a familiar nod.

Fish bone strata
tell the story

of seaboard fishers
all over this
north land:
of herring shoals
of haddies, leopach, cod,

of sooyan, plashak –
long gone.
The canerack no more,
only sculptures to remind
along the shore.

Boat and mate
ready to pull
creels of partan
and maybe lobster for a
country-house restaurant.

You smile me
a wide horizon
of knowing.
Each fold of
skin on your
salted flesh shares
a chink of understanding
that comes only
from being
old red sandstone –
layer upon layer of
ocean, life, land.

Glossary of Easter Ross Seaboard Dialect:

leopach – flounder
sooyan – saithe
plashak – plaice
canerack – salmon fishing

From the Lighthouse, October.

Ian McFadyen

After a day
of grey and driving
wind and rain,
Ardnamurchan,
completely at peace and
brimful of sunshine,
astonishes again.

Here at the lighthouse, we perch like birds
on the edge of an endless, horizonless blue.
The Small Isles, unveiled, are out there basking
- that's Eigg with the green dorsal hump.

Stately as ever, the Lord of the Isles
emerges from a golden conflagration
down the Sound of Mull.

And behind us
in the shining rain-cleared air,
over rough and rolling bogland,
the miles of reeds and mosses,
shrubs and grasses
are blending as they turn
into a rich and glowing amber –
a landscape the colour of whisky.

Sierra Nevada: Volcanic Arc, Inactive Subduction Zone

L Goldsmith

Through magma chambers cooled I walk
over Jurassic stone, batholith, granite
that rose—may have—

plutons from underground
formed 200 million years ago

to be eroded now, into peaks,
sliding plates done, tectonics at rest
(that once pushed)

delamination perhaps,
of batholith losing its base—eclogite
holding keel down for heaviness

the mountains, the range,

land to the east
dropping away

I am roaming with history
by volcano's opening
to explosions that blew

laccoliths into distance
rounding the sharpnesses
I feel—

stocks and dikes of rising, striving
to hold their place—
find their escape in surfacing

to breathe
their solidness
from fires reaching
above what is
the mantle.

Anabiosis: Return to the Living

L Goldsmith

In the Karst rocks facing north
off the mountain trail that's been without rain,
you now come alive again to moisture—
bursting thunderhead clouds spilling down
drenching with nourishment.

Ramonda Serbica,
your name asleep a long time—
presumed dead.

Twelve hours for sky's water to revive,
to awaken you on this afternoon in April
with Sun soon to visit with its trail of clouds
and the trills of rock thrush

discoverings of sought-after spring.



Caroline Watson, *Waking Sticks*, charcoal & pastel on paper, 32 x 44 cm

At Wiston Lodge

for the SCG conference June 2019

Carol McKay

i

A crow shadow crosses feathered ground
and me,
blue speedwell,
and white purslane,
impermanent as the tail bob of a rabbit
behind beech, fern, oak, centuries old.

Someone's passed on a horse, before me:
iron-shoe indents scribe in turf
till the heavy rain.

There is bird and bee cacophony,
and my footsteps and breath:
all part of Earth's *biophony*.

Derelict buildings shaped from stones
chiselled once and rearranged,
are far less subject to change.

ii

Paths weave me through Wiston Woods
through trees whose ruddy bark
and annual leaf and needle litter
texture the ground beneath my feet.

I reach the fence at the field edge,
forest at my back, leaving that talk
of ecopoetry and planet peril:
human worry's warp and weft.

Ahead, a nap of pasture, barely grazed
by a scatter of sheep whose wool
is valued less than the shearing time.
The panic comes. I still my mind.

Ahead is Tinto, whose weathered rock
the eye defines in human scale –
the cuppable dome of a child's head –
clad in a stout hard hat.



Membership

The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics is a membership organisation which relies on members' subscriptions to fund its activities which are carried out by volunteers. Its purpose is to raise awareness of geopoetics as a crucial way to approach and creatively respond to the natural world of which we are part.

It is a network of individuals including visual artists, writers, musicians, ornithologists, geologists, botanists, teachers and lecturers who share a common interest in developing an understanding of geopoetics and applying it creatively in their lives. The Centre organises talks, discussions, events and field walks which are designed to extend members' knowledge and experience of geopoetics. As the main English language geopoetics centre, it has members in USA, Sweden, Germany, France, Poland, Ireland, Australia, Wales and England as well as throughout Scotland.

Further information is available from normanbissell@btinternet.com and at www.geopoetics.org.uk.

If you join or renew your annual membership you will receive:

- a free copy of *Grounding a World; Essays on the Work of Kenneth White*, ed. G Bowd, C Forsdick & N Bissell rrp £9.95.
- newsletters by e-mail.
- advance news of and discounts on books relating to geopoetics.
- advance news of Kenneth White and geopoetics events.
- invitations to all our meetings and field visits.
- the satisfaction of assisting the development of our geopoetics work and publications.
- encouragement to develop your own understanding of and creative response to geopoetics.

Please send this completed form with a cheque for £10 waged/£5 unwaged, payable to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, to David Francis, 214 Portobello High Street Edinburgh EH15 2AU. Or you can pay by standing order or bank transfer to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics account no. 00694888 sort code 80-02-24.

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Contributors

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L Goldsmith wrote her first book, *Secondary Cicatrices* and won the 2018 Halcyon Poetry Prize, was a 2019 Finalist in the American Book Fest Awards, a 2020 Human Relations Indie Book Award Gold Winner and a Finalist in the International Book Awards. Her poetry has been published in *Spillway*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *All-Creatures.Org*, *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, *The Environmental Magazine*, *Red Planet Magazine*, *Interalia Magazine*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, among others.

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Alyson Hallett's *The Migration Habits of Stone* is a poetry and public art project that Alyson has been curating for 18 years. Work is sited in Australia, USA, Scotland and England. The migrations Alyson makes with stones has been documented in an audio diary for Radio 4, presented at The Geological Society (UK) and the Bellamine Forum, Los Angeles. *Stone Talks*, an essay recounting adventures/poems/images with stones was published in 2019. www.thestonelibrary.com

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Carol McKay's poetry pamphlet *Reading the Landscape* was published by Hedgehog Poetry Press in February 2022. Her short fiction and poetry have featured in literary magazines and anthologies including *New Writing Scotland*, *Gutter*, *Mslexia*, *Chapman* and *Wasafiri*. She won the Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship in 2010 and taught creative writing through The Open University from 2004 till 2018. <http://carolmckay.co.uk>

Elaine Morrison is based in Drumlithie in Aberdeenshire. She juggles work in education with family life, too many cats, doctoral research into the life and work of poet Helen B Cruickshank, and writing creative nonfiction and poetry. Her first degree is in geography and sociology. Elaine's creative writing focuses on the inter-relationship between people and environment. Water and rocks are an obsession. She is a committee member of Mearns Writers and is leading a project to set up a writing group for young people focusing on wellbeing.

James Murray-White is a writer and filmmaker; has been an environmental journalist in the Middle East, and was senior producer on a local TV Channel. He is currently making films that reveal the crucial elements of the natural world we often overlook: beavers (and the case for re-introduction), rooks (a huge rookery in Norfolk) and preparing for death. His documentary on the contemporary relevance of mystic artist William Blake will be screened later in the year. www.findingblake.org.uk.

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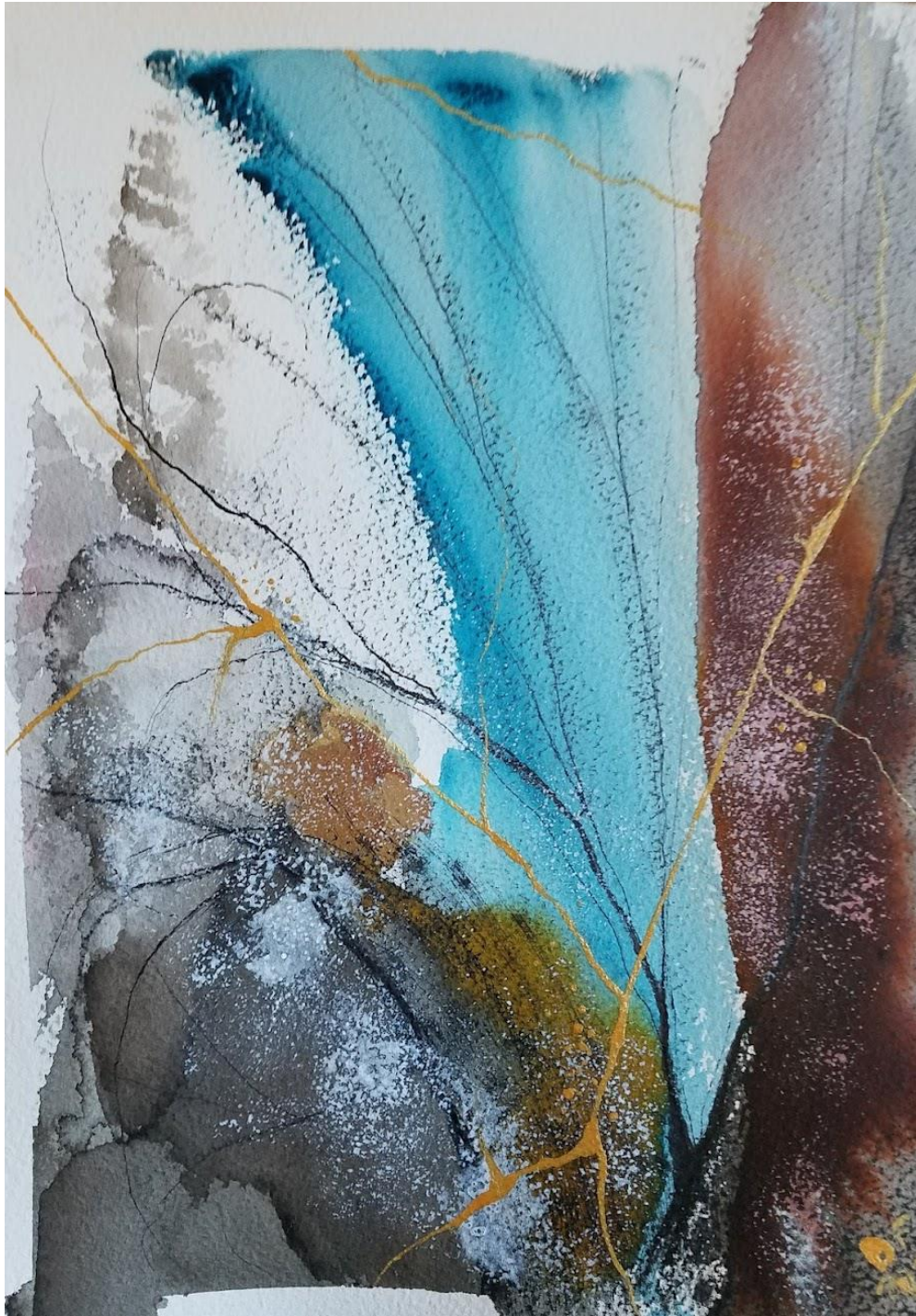
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Caroline Watson is a Canadian Scot dividing her time between her studio in an old thread mill and working in housing and homelessness. She completed her studies at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design with a self-directed residency in the Orkney Islands. She enjoys the labour of making drawings in mixed materials depicting light and space to create work that is about attachment to place. She has exhibited in Scotland and Canada including RGI, VAS and PAI and in 2020 received a VACMA award to develop her interest in photography. She is a member of the SCG Council and part of the editorial team.
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